

VZCZCXRO0209
PP RUEHCHI RUEHNH RUEHPB
DE RUEHDT #0381/01 2061105
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 251105Z JUL 06
FM AMEMBASSY DILI
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 2826
INFO RHEHAAA/NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL WASHINGTON DC
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK PRIORITY 0627
RUCNARF/ASEAN REGIONAL FORUM COLLECTIVE
RUEHXX/GENEVA IO MISSIONS COLLECTIVE
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA PRIORITY 0700
RUEHLI/AMEMBASSY LISBON PRIORITY 0618
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY 0456
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO PRIORITY 0481
RUEHWL/AMEMBASSY WELLINGTON PRIORITY 0557
RUEHBR/AMEMBASSY BRASILIA PRIORITY 0351
RHHMUNA/HQ USPACOM HONOLULU HI
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RUEHDT/AMEMBASSY DILI 2154

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 DILI 000381

SIPDIS

NOFORN

PACOM FOR POLAD
NSC FOR HOLLY MORROW
USUN FOR GORDON OLSON AND RICHARD MCCURRY
DEPT FOR IO, EAP/MTS
SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 7/25/2016
TAGS: [KPKO](#) [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [KJUS](#) [UN](#) [AU](#) [TT](#)
SUBJECT: CONTINUED TENSIONS OVER NATIONAL POLICE REINTEGRATION

REF: DILI 352

DILI 00000381 001.2 OF 003

CLASSIFIED BY: Elizabeth S. Wharton, Political Officer, Embassy
Dili, State.
REASON: 1.4 (b)

¶1. (C/NF) Summary: Tensions have continued in recent weeks between the Australian Federal Police (AFP) and the Minister of Interior, Alcino Barris, regarding how to handle the reintegration of East Timor's national police (the PNTL). Each have presented proposals with competing approaches and priorities, with the AFP arguing for a thorough vetting of all police officers to precede reintegration, and the Minister pushing for an expedited process to get police back on the job quickly. There are several underlying reasons for this continued tension, including fundamentally differing views on the state of the PNTL, different immediate priorities, and cultural differences undermining effective communication between the two. There have been some recent indications that a compromise approach may yet emerge, possibly to involve very limited PNTL operations in advance of complete vetting. How this issue is handled in the coming weeks and months will have potentially serious implications both for short and long-term stability in East Timor. End summary.

Competing proposals for police reintegration

¶2. (C/NF) There has been a continuing stalemate between the Australian Federal Police (AFP) and the Minister of Interior, Alcino Barris, (see reftel) over recent weeks in regard to the question of when and how to bring the National Police (PNTL) back to work in Dili. In early July, the AFP presented a plan for PNTL reintegration, which involved extensive vetting of all members of the PNTL before they could start working again in Dili. Barris reportedly objected both to the manner in which

the AFP presented their plan, reportedly framing it as a directive rather than consulting with the Minister in advance, and to what he deemed to be excessive requirements before any police could return to work in the capital. He presented his own counter proposal emphasizing much faster vetting to be conducted by a Ministry-led commission. An impasse ensued as Barris made moves to constitute his commission while AFP Commander Steve Lancaster relayed to Emboff that if PNTL began working without a process of which he approved, the AFP would disarm them and remove them from operations.

¶3. (C/NF) Last week there appeared to be some moves towards compromise as the AFP presented a revised proposal that Commander Lancaster said incorporated elements of Barris' proposal. However, according to one of Barris' advisors, the presentation of the new proposal was accompanied by significant pressure on Barris to sign off immediately. Barris refused pending additional changes, and the plan is to be reviewed again this week. (Note: While international policing is being conducted by police from all four contributing international forces, the AFP has taken the lead regarding the reintegration issues. The other international police forces reportedly are remaining neutral on the issue. End note.)

The view from AFP

¶4. (C/NF) In conversations Emboffs have had with representatives on both sides of the issue, it is clear that the two institutions have very different assessments of the state of the PNTL. The AFP views the PNTL as essentially have disintegrated during the recent unrest, beginning with their ineffective response to the April 28 riots and culminating in their disappearance from law enforcement duties during the violence of May 23-25. Perhaps more importantly, the AFP believe the PNTL not only failed in carrying out their duties, but also participated in the recent violence. They point to the many allegations of various police elements being involved in the late May fighting as well as participating in the mob violence

DILI 00000381 002.2 OF 003

that overtook Dili thereafter. The AFP therefore believes that only a thorough vetting of all PNTL members, will address both the issue of professional capacity as well as allegations of wrong doing. They see the Minister's push for a faster process as reflecting an inclination to avoid genuine accountability and reinstitute the same failed institution.

¶5. (C/NF) Meanwhile, the AFP's present priority is not on the PNTL at all, but rather on the successful establishment of international police operations in Dili. As of July 17, international police have taken over full responsibility for city security from military forces for 15 hours a day and are working towards 24-hour coverage. From this perspective, the AFP regards the issue of PNTL integration as potentially diverting resources and energy from their primary mission. AFP Commander Lancaster has stated that they are in no hurry to begin working with PNTL officers they regard as discredited and inexperienced. Moreover, he describes Minister Barris' emphasis on bringing the PNTL on board quickly as complicating, and in some cases obstructing, operational needs. One example he notes is Barris' resistance to allowing the AFP to take over the PNTL headquarters. In addition, he said that Barris has attempted to circumvent coordination with international police to force a rapid return of the PNTL to Dili, in one instance by declaring that PNTL would immediately begin co-patrolling with the Malaysian police. Lancaster expressed his resentment on these issues, stating they distract from immediate policing needs.

The view from the Minister of Interior and PNTL

¶6. (C/NF) While Minister Barris acknowledges the need to screen police before returning them to full duties in Dili, he does not see the PNTL as the failed institution described by the AFP. Rather, he notes that a small number of police officers were involved in the recent unrest, but that these officers are already well known both within the police and in the community

at large. Moreover, he points out that several hundred of the Dili-based police force, probably more than half, have registered at PNTL headquarters and are waiting for the opportunity to return to work. He therefore believes that with some basic screening procedures, the majority of the Dili PNTL could be back to work quickly. Also, in recent conversations he has stated his belief that the internally displaced people (IDPs) need to see the PNTL back on streets to feel safe before returning to their neighborhoods.

¶7. (C/NF) The Minister, as well as his two international advisors who are both long-term reliable contacts of the Embassy, also complained that the AFP's approach to working with the PNTL has been overly directive, with relatively little genuine consultation in advance of decisions. One of his advisors stated to Emboff that the current AFP plan for PNTL reintegration is in fact very good, but that it will fail if implemented because it does not address or account for cultural issues and will be resented and undermine over the long term as a result.

¶8. (C/NF) Sources within both the ministry and the police have described to Emboffs what they view as arrogance and disrespect on the part of the AFP. They note that the police remaining at the headquarters are not acknowledged as colleagues and are instead treated by the AFP as incompetent. An American UN police advisor worried that the police are being progressively demoralized by not being allowed to operate in Dili, having all their equipment confiscated, and prohibited from appearing in public in uniform. One example that particularly rankled some police was the AFP refusal to permit officers to wear their uniforms to the funeral of a colleague killed during the May 25 police massacre.

¶8. (SBU) Views regarding the process needed before PNTL can return to work also vary significantly among the police

DILI 00000381 003.2 OF 003

themselves. Some, such as Ismael Babo, the Deputy Commissioner for Operations who was closely aligned with discredited former Minister of Interior Lobato, conveyed to Emboffs that the blame for the recent crisis lay entirely with the F-FDTL. He strongly implied that no specific PNTL vetting or review process was necessary and that the police could return to work in Dili immediately. Others, including those at the headquarters who are predominately from the West as well as the higher-ranking eastern police who remain outside of Dili, argue strongly that a thorough vetting and reconciliation process should precede a return to normal policing.

Room for compromise?

¶9. (SBU) UN police have also been discussing possible approaches to the vetting and reintegration issue. One UN police representative recently relayed to us that a "win-win" solution that addresses the concerns of both international police and the Ministry is in the works. This would involve a fast track process to get PNTL back to work in the short term, but with limited powers, followed by a thorough vetting process that will most likely be conducted by the police component of the next UN mission. In the short term, the most likely solution would be for PNTL to operate unarmed and conduct joint patrols with international police.

¶10. (SBU) Since his swearing in on July 10, Prime Minister Jose Ramos-Horta has become more involved in the police issue, meeting with both AFP Commander Lancaster and Minister Barris on a regular basis. The involvement of the Prime Minister's office is viewed as a positive development by both and should continue to help the move the negotiations forward. In recent conversations with Ramos-Horta, he stated that he is not getting involved in the details, but trying to set the overall direction. He emphasized, however, that his approach is generally to defer to the AFP and to encourage the MOI to cooperate with them.

¶11. (C/NF) Comment: The issue of how to handle the PNTL in Dili has potentially serious implications both for short and long-term stability. Too much delay in the reintegration process will likely lead to an increasingly unhappy and restless PNTL, and alienation between PNTL officers and their Australian counterparts would negatively impact their future working relationship. On the other hand, bringing the PNTL back into action precipitously would leave grave doubts about PNTL involvement in the May-June violence that wracked Dili and compromise public confidence in police impartiality in protecting Dili's communities as displaced persons return home. Given these concerns, the idea of a two-stage reintegration beginning with co-patrolling with international police may be the only way to give the PNTL some visibility and credibility as an active force in Dili, without compromising the longer term need for a full review and vetting process. End comment.

WHITMAN